

Dr Ian Shanahan
57 Yates Avenue
Dundas Valley NSW 2117
AUSTRALIA

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CARL PANVINO: Report on MMus Submission

a) The Compositions

I must confess at the outset that most of my comments below are quite critical of Mr Panvino's music – although there are some mitigating factors. Indeed, his global mark of 81% – a distinction – has been earned largely due to the merits of his written thesis in conjunction, to a lesser extent, with a certain flair in dealing with the superficial dimensions of his scores! (I have, perhaps, erred somewhat here towards generosity, in the absence of any prescribed mark-weightings within the accompanying paperwork.) Nonetheless, I shall open with some positive remarks:

Mr Panvino's composition portfolio undoubtedly exhibits a satisfying level of artisanal competence, in that his handling of most aspects of musical notation – and his score-presentation in general – is adroit. Likewise, the instrumental facet of his craft is proficient to say the least: for each instrument that he utilizes, there is clearly a pretty sound knowledge of its technical capabilities and limitations. Moreover, comprehensive score-prefaces carefully explain matters (though on some points they might instead serve to confuse...). In all of *these* areas, Mr Panvino meets what I would regard as a prerequisite benchmark of professionalism for a postgraduate composition student.

But alas: whilst Mr Panvino's scores on the whole sport an elegance, sophistication and complexity of appearance, *the music itself* which they encode is merely complicated, without possessing (as one might hope for, given its surface) a rich network of relational strands – this being the true measure of musical complexity. So what we have here is mere 'cleverness' in the face of a music of very dubious musicality; a crushing harmonic gloom; and a murky turgidity exacerbated by a dearth of ideas, innate motivation, creativity, real vision, or 'soul'. In a nutshell, this dull (and, in the case of **Light Wells**, grotesque) music at every architectonic level 'looks' much better on the page than it sounds. Certain items from Mr Panvino's compositional bag-of-tricks – the main perpetrator that springs to mind being the ostensibly 'profound' octaves/unisons and triads which obtrude from time to time in many of his pieces – are, frankly, annoying: they strike the ear as utterly anomalous and inexplicable within the context of soundscapes otherwise dominated by 'noise' (as in **Jenůfa Percussion**), chromaticism, or microtonality. Even more fatal: I often discern a gross imbalance between this music's (macro)form and its detail, resulting in sections or whole movements of vastly excessive length in relation to their (usually rather banal) content; as a consequence, boredom rapidly sets in. For example, the unimaginative rhythmic 'droning upon B's' over several octaves within **Jenůfa Percussion** lasts far too long (as does, I might add, the ensuing section): the sheer tenacity of what is already simplistic threadbareness becomes for this audient downright infuriating.

At the micro- and meso-levels, however, Mr Panvino's rhythmic organization is potentially interesting – though it is frequently marred by unnecessary notational contortions in the treatment of tuplets. For example, the numbers within his tuplets' $\frac{m}{n}$ ratios are often reducible: in **Jenůfa Percussion**, for instance, we encounter formulae like $\frac{10}{6}$ and $\frac{10}{8}$ which are simply $\frac{5}{3}$ and $\frac{5}{4}$ respectively; another such complication I recall seeing somewhere in one of the submitted pieces is $\frac{24}{16}$, which readily collapses to $\frac{3}{2}$!

I shall now propose, in point form, a few other 'bones of contention' that pertain generally to Mr Panvino's composition portfolio:

- **ACCIDENTALS & NOTE-SPELLING:** Mr Panvino's (quasi-traditional) symbology for accidentals within the highly chromatic or microtonal contexts of his music is both outmoded and totally impractical; it is also 'explained' within his Performance Notes in a manner which is guaranteed to bamboozle. Within *any* bar containing numerous notes – with this composer, the majority – performers cannot be expected to remember, towards the end of a bar, whether a note has to be inflected or not; much rehearsal time shall therefore be wasted as I know, from my considerable experience in performing new music myself, that players will be forced to add a myriad of accidental-signs to their parts by hand. The solution is simply to provide such signs for *every* pitch (unless an obvious repetition occurs). Moreover, Mr Panvino's note-spelling (as in **Night Cross(-ing)** and **Light Wells**) is also frequently ludicrous.
- **DURATIONS WITHIN GLISSANDI:** One should *never* use rests to indicate *sounding* durations within glissandi (as Mr Panvino has done throughout his portfolio); rather, signify such durations with note-stems *à la* Xenakis (using those of crotchets or smaller values).
- **PROGRAMME NOTES:** Those programme annotations that Mr Panvino has provided with his scores are usually quite informative and interesting – as is the case with **The Wedding in Cana**, for example. Mysteriously, however, certain scores lack such texts for no apparent reason. **Light Wells**, for instance (whose intriguing title bears no relation to its movements' names) leaves one curious to know what it is all about.
- **OPUS NUMBERS:** Not only are these old-fashioned (in an age obsessed with documentation), but for a neophyte student-composer, they are pretentious in the extreme.
- **THE ACCOMPANYING COMPACT DISC:** CD track-listings (here a small printed sheet stuck on the front of the jewel case) ought to acknowledge – that is, actually *name* – all performers, sound engineers etc. who participated in the music's recording. Not to do so reveals an arrogance and lack of respect towards one's colleagues. (Such listings *within the scores themselves* do not suffice.) I note also that the piano piece of Track 3, **Night Cross(-ing)**, has had its name unaccountably changed to "**Star Cross(-ing)**" on the CD's track-list: so what *is* this composition's true title?

I shall now focus my remarks upon particular pieces – not the whole corpus – from within Mr Panvino's composition portfolio (in point form, as above):

i) *Jenûfa Percussion*

- This work is conceptually flawed at the most basic level: it is no exaggeration to observe that each percussionist devotes more energy to changing mallets and/or instruments than to actually making sounds! Such an approach intrinsically robs the musicians of the opportunity to settle down and elicit the best possible sounds from their instruments. One example suffices (p.1, percussionist 5): this performer is afforded precisely 2 seconds to dispense with a pair of timpani sticks, take up two yarn mallets, all the while moving from a timpano to a bass drum, thence to compose themselves; such gymnastics are nigh on impossible! Impracticabilities like this could have been sidestepped easily had this piece been better thought-out from the start – for instance, why not employ more percussionists (who are hardly an endangered species, particularly in Sydney)?
- **DISPOSITION OF INSTRUMENTS:** Although the score displays two possible *global* arrangements of the players relative to the audience, *each player* needs to be provided with a detailed set-up diagram for their own battery of percussion instruments. The absence of such diagrams again betrays sloppy compositional thinking at the most basic conceptual level: many performative difficulties could readily have been overcome had instrumental layouts been planned beforehand; percussionists' preparation-time would have been shortened...
- **INTRODUCTION (PP.1–5):** This opening is timbrally excellent (despite the crassness of the *exactly* repeated 'Jenûfa motive' by timpani) and embraces a fine build-up – but what follows is a huge let-down when one has been led along expecting to be amazed. I have already criticized this latter section of music above, but this question still needs to be asked: Why demand vibraphones and (5-octave!) marimbas when so few pitch-classes are summoned here anyway? Indeed, this piece's instrumentarium is *incredibly* extravagant in relation to its timbral/pitch(-class) gamut – militating against repeat performances, and (again) exposing basic conceptual flaws.

- **CLICK TRACKS:** Rather than relying upon antiquated multi-track tape-players, would it surely not be better these days to use, during rehearsal, a computer running sequencing software (their MIDI files being provided as part of the score)? Of course, it would be preferable to dispense with such burdensome gadgetry altogether: When complicated multinested tuplets prevail: (i) proportionalize each part *à la* time-space notation; (ii) use bold ictuses to show where the J-beat lies (very simple when there are no grace-notes present); (iii) ensure that each part includes plenty of rhythmic cues from other parts. *This suggestion also applies to other pieces in the portfolio.*
- **MALLET SYMBOLOGY:** Excellent!
- **WINDCHIMES:** “chimes” is a bad abbreviation for windchimes, since Americans refer to tubular bells as chimes. “Wchimes” would be better.
- **BAR 23:** I can see no clear reason why the tempo should suddenly double here. Why not simply halve the rhythmic values from this point?
- **THE LONG (10- & 20-SECOND) PAUSES:** These should be given a whole bar to themselves at each occurrence, such as at the end of bar 50. As notated, they might be overlooked amidst the welter of other information.
- **VIBRAPHONES (P.12):** “senza pedale” makes absolutely no sense in relation to the (long) notated durations!
- **PERCUSSION 1 (P.30):** $\text{—}6:15\text{—}$ should be $\text{—}12:15\text{—}$ (*mutatis mutandis*); indeed, this score is riddled with similar such tuplet errors, where in $\text{—}m:n\text{—}$, $m \ll n$.

ii) *Night Cross(-ing)*

- The soundworld of this piano solo (particularly of the “Stars” movement), infused throughout by a repugnant harmonic grammar, is in no way evocative of the grandeur, majesty and brilliance of the (Australian) night sky – regardless of the Program Note’s declarations.
- **NOTE-SPELLING:** As I have affirmed previously, Mr Panvino’s note-spelling is frequently absurd. Two examples should suffice, selected pretty much at random: (i) the last bar of “Moon” is merely an A \flat minor triad; (ii) bar 36 of “Stars” is an A \flat major triad in 1st inversion!
- **PERFORMANCE NOTES No.5:** The example given here is preposterous! It is extremely likely that if a pianist were to encounter this example they would just redepress the sostenuto pedal (irrespective of Mr Panvino’s symbology); and an additional S occupies valuable horizontal space. The protocol universally accepted these days is to draw each pedal’s graphics *always* on different levels, in the top-to-bottom order sustaining pedal (*Ped*), sostenuto pedal (*Sost*), una corda pedal (*u.c.*) – i.e. right-to-left pedals correlate with top-to-bottom, by analogy with the keys.

iii) *Light Wells*

- This piece proffers a soteriological trajectory (the composer’s?) from “Apostasy” – via “Despair” and “Ambivalence” – to “Faith” thence “Salvation”. And yet there is a certain sameness (of gesture and texture) between many of the five movements: most particularly, “Apostasy” and “Faith” – as states of belief being unquestionably polar opposites – are treated musically in an almost identical manner! Alas, there are no programme notes to shed light on this bizarre anomaly...
- In the duo version of this work (3rd and 5th movements) the oboe is treated just as another organ stop: dynamic nuances in the oboe part are almost completely absent, and so it is often devoid of expressive substance ... this amounts to yet another instance of unmusicality by **Light Wells’** composer.
- Within the 1st movement (“Apostasy”), much of the linear pitch-material derives from 0145 tetrachords articulated by augmentations and diminutions – i.e. ‘gear-shifts’ – of simple rhythmic cells comprising four attacks. It might help the interpreter(s) to know this, since some bars – specifically, bars 9 and 14 – have been notated in an unnecessarily tortuous manner, despite the provision of a rhythm cue-line. On a separate page, I suggest a notational solution...

b) *The Research Thesis*

In total contrast to Mr Panvino's composition portfolio, I have little to offer but praise for his research thesis concerning the string quartets of Giacinto Scelsi. What has impressed me most of all about it is the fact that its author – a 'mere' MMus candidate in composition, not musicology – took the considerable trouble to gain access to primary sources in Rome, thereby uncovering original data (as detailed, for example, in fn.12 on p.3) that rectifies certain misconceptions about Scelsi's compositional methodology. Moreover, the thesis is, on the whole, quite well-written (despite Mr Panvino's faulty understanding of the use of semicolons and commas in certain contexts), and is even entertaining to read in parts; of course, the analyses themselves are *per se* heavier going. Indeed, I would like to see the amended version of this thesis published (as an extended journal article?) *in toto*.

On the negative side, however, there are over 50 typographical, grammatical or punctuational errors and inconsistencies which definitely require correction – these are all listed in the appended **Emendations & Errata** sheets – and I insist also that an emendation be made to the thesis (in the form of an additional, brief Appendix) regarding the Golden Section ratio and the associated Fibonacci series, the former of which is first referred to on p.12 and enters the analytical discussion many times thereafter: It is simply unreasonable to assume that likely readers, many of whom – regardless of their musical erudition – will possess little (if any) knowledge of these mathematical subjects, would appreciate their significance or exactly how they have been applied to the analyses. (I shall specify precisely what I believe is needed here within the abovementioned **Emendations & Errata** pages.)

c) *Mark and Recommendations*

Mark: 81%.

Recommendation: Award Mr Panvino the MMus degree subject to minor emendations being made.

I would also like to add two points:

(i) In the light of Mr Panvino's basic compositional tribulations (as detailed above), to some extent counteracted by his excellent thesis evincing impressive research and analytical skills, I do believe that in future Mr Panvino would be much better suited to directing his energies towards *musicology*, regardless of any doctoral ambitions;

(ii) If Mr Panvino still wishes to pursue further formal studies in composition towards a PhD, then this should be delayed for a period of *at least 3 years*, during which time Mr Panvino should undertake much intensive workshopping of his (extant) music by *professional musicians* leading, hopefully, to its public exposure, commercial CD recordings, reviews, etc. Such activity might serve to correct some of the composerly 'errors of his ways', and would certainly provide him with critical performative experience – an area of Mr Panvino's music-making that is sorely lacking but which, I would have thought, is a *sine qua non* for anybody wishing to gain a doctorate in composition.

Yours sincerely,

Ian Shanahan, BMus(Hons) Syd PhD Syd FBCPS

EMENDATIONS & ERRATA

a) *Emendations*

As asserted above, an emendation needs to be made to Mr Panvino's research thesis (in the form of an additional, brief Appendix) regarding the Golden Section ratio Φ and the Fibonacci series $\{F_n\}$. It requires *at least* the following:

- (i) Formal mathematical definitions of both, including geometrical interpretations (self-similarity, etc.);
- (ii) Discussion of how they are related to one another mathematically;
- (iii) Full details of precisely how the proportional analyses within the thesis have been carried out (by beat-counting regardless of tempo? [a flawed, misleading method...]; by conversion to absolute clock-time from the score, including tempo-changes? [the best and most accurate way to reveal compositional intent]; by division of performance-durations from CD recordings?);
- (iv) Discussion of what precisely the presence of these phenomena in Scelsi's music actually *means* – both to Scelsi himself, and in a broader natural-cultural-cosmological sense.

The following excerpt from my own PhD thesis may be of assistance in relation to points (i) and (ii):

The Fibonacci series is defined by the recursion formula $F_{n+2} = F_{n+1} + F_n$ (with $F_1 = F_2 = 1$), which thus yields an infinite set: $F = \{F_n\} = \{1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 144, \dots\}$. If we now design a new recursive sequence $R_{n+1} = F_{n+1} \div F_n$ based upon the ratios of successive Fibonacci numbers, then we can ascertain that as n becomes ever larger, so R_n becomes an increasingly better approximation of – and indeed, eventually converges upon – the venerable 'Golden Section' ratio, Φ : i.e. the limit as $n \rightarrow \infty$ of R_n is $\Phi = ((\sqrt{5} + 1) \div 2) \approx 1.6180339887$. So the bigger that n becomes, the more our Fibonacci series resembles a true 'geometric progression' whose common ratio is Φ .

a) *Errata*

i) *The Research Thesis*

- Acknowledgements, line 1: the name "Peter McCullum" should be "Peter McCallum".
- p.1, ¶1, line 3: "... Western art music ...". Ensure that the "W" of "Western" is capitalized throughout the text – many are not.
- p.1, ¶1, line 10: "... 1970s;" should be "... 1970s,". (Convert the semicolon to a comma.)
- p.1, ¶1, line 13: footnote numbers. Ensure that all footnote numbers throughout the text are printed to the right of all local punctuation – many are not.
- p.2, 2nd-last line: "... music making ..." should be "... music-making ...". (Hyphenate this throughout the text.)
- p.4, end of ¶2: a reference to Figure 1 is missing.
- p.4, fn.16: the citation should be "Kyle Gann, ... vol.42, ...". Fix this in the Bibliography as well.
- p.6, ¶1, line 3: "... novel;" should be "... novel,". (Convert the semicolon to a comma.)
- p.6, ¶3, line 1: "... music;" should be "... music,". (Convert the semicolon to a comma.)
- p.7, last line: "... period that the [sic] he was content with" should be "... period with which he was content".
- p.7, fn.21, line 2: the citation "... Scelsi:Prassi ..." should be "... Scelsi: Prassi ...". Fix this in the Bibliography as well.
- p.8, ¶2, line 6: "... again;" should be "... again,". (Convert the semicolon to a comma.)
- p.8, ¶4, lines 2–3: hyphenate "music making".

- p.8, end of fn.27: “p51” should be “p.51”.
- p.9, ¶2, line 8: “... let lone recorded, ...” should be “... let alone recorded, ...”.
- p.9, ¶2, last line: “... to be of much more ...” should be “... to be of a much more ...”.
- p.9, ¶3, line 1: “... quartet;” should be “... quartet,”. (Convert the semicolon to a comma.)
- p.10, line 1 (last word): replace “got” with “received”. (The word “got” is crude and colloquial in this context.)
- p.11, ¶2, line 7: “... music;” should be “... music,”. (Convert the semicolon to a comma.)
- p.12, 5th-last line: reference is made to “Appendix 1”, which does not exist anywhere within this thesis!
- p.12, fn.37, line 1: “... Sting ...” should be “... String ...”.
- p.14, fn.40, last line: “... math ...” should be “... mathematics ...” (or “... maths ...”). (Mercifully, Australia has not yet succumbed totally to such Americanisms.)
- p.26, line 4 (first word): ‘conflict’ should be “conflict”. (Be absolutely consistent with your usage of each type of inverted comma: within this thesis you have already established that double inverted commas surround quotes, single inverted commas bracket words used ironically, etc.)
- p.29, ¶2, 2nd-last line: “... 3/4 bars which, ...” should be “... 3/4 bars, which ...”. (Redeploy the comma.)
- p.30, ¶3, line 5 (last word): “... tendency;” should be “... tendency,”. (Convert the semicolon to a comma.)
- p.34, fn.59: the CD mentioned herein (Accord 200622) is not listed in the Bibliography when it ought to be.
- p.35, ¶2, line 6: “... and an in increase ...” should be “... and an increase ...”.
- p.35, ¶2, 3rd-last line: “... markedly;” should be “... markedly,”. (Convert the semicolon to a comma.)
- p.35, ¶2, 2nd-last line: “... a fatally driven ...” perhaps should be “... a fatalistically driven ...” or instead “... a fatefully driven ...” (depending upon your precise intended meaning) – “fatally” implies actual physical death, which is surely not intended in this context.
- p.36, first line: “... that it first appeared in” should be “... in which it first appeared”. (Avoid such ‘dangling conjunctions’ in formal writing.)
- p.37, fn.62: insert a space after the footnote number.
- p.40, text describing Figure 16, line 2: “No.3/ ...” should be “No.3 / ...”. (Insert a space after “3”.)
- p.41, ¶3, line 8: “... individually;” should be “... individually,”. (Convert the semicolon to a comma.)
- p.41, ¶3, line 17: “... timelessness;” should be “... timelessness,”. (Convert the semicolon to a comma.)
- p.41, ¶3, line 20: “... music;” and “... gestalt;” should be “... music,” and “... gestalt,” respectively. (Convert the semicolons to commas.) In any case, the sentence beginning in line 20 – “Finally, ... intact.” – needs to be rewritten since it is not a true sentence: the initial clause demands a verb.
- p.42, ¶1, line 1: “... borne out ...” should be “... born out ...”. (The past participle of *bear*, “borne”, in such passive constructions suggests physical movement.)
- p.42, ¶3, line 8: “... mutes which, are ...” should be “... mutes, which are ...”. (Redeploy the comma.)
- p.43, ¶3, line 11: “... is he retains ...” should, for the sake of clarity, be “... is that he retains ...”.
- p.43, 2nd-last line: “... which, was ...” should be “... which was ...”. (Delete the comma.)
- p.44, line 2: hyphenate “music making”.
- p.44, 2nd italicized quote, line 1: standardize ellipses markings to 3 dots throughout the text.
- p.45, ¶2, line 2: “... fascination and admiration of ...” should be “... fascination for and admiration of ...”.
- p.45, ¶2, line 6: ‘higher’ should be “higher”.
- p.45, last line: “... Scelsi’ musical ...” should be “... Scelsi’s musical ...”.
- p.46, lines 5–6: “... would by Western standards, constitute as salient ...” should be “... would, by Western standards, constitute salient ...”. (Delete “as” and add a comma after “would”.)
- p.47, ¶2, line 7: “... timbrel ...” should be “... timbral ...”. (A *timbrel* is a type of Renaissance tambourine; “timbral” is the adjective of *timbre*.)
- p.47, ¶2, line 13: “... tessitura ...” and “... reflexion ...” should be “... gamut ...” and “... reflection ...” respectively. (The technical term “tessitura” refers to part of a pitch-range, “gamut” to the whole; “reflexion” is a strictly British variant of “reflection”.)
- p.47, 3rd-last line: “... them to be;” should be “... them to be:”. (Convert the semicolon to a colon.)
- p.48, line 2: “... article titled, ...” should be “... article titled ...”. (Delete the comma.)

- p.48, ¶4, line 10: "... bridge;" should be "... bridge," or better yet "... bridge – ...". (Convert the semicolon to a comma or, preferably, to a dash.)
- p.48, ¶4, 4th-last line: "... of sound which, is ..." should be "... of sound, which is ...". (Redeploy the comma.)
- p.49, ¶1, end of line 6: add a comma directly after the word "traditionally".
- p.49, ¶1, line 8: "... amount scrutiny ..." should be "... amount of scrutiny ...".
- p.49, ¶1 of §4.4, line 6: "... of in the music ..." should be "... of the music ...". (Delete "in".)
- p.49, ¶1 of §4.4, last line: "... the end reader" should be "... from the end reader". (Add "from", for clarity.)

i) *The Scores*

- **Jenûfa Percussion**, Programme Note: Italicize (or bold-face) all pieces' titles therein.
- **Light Wells** (oboe and organ version), Performance Notes, 3rd bullet point: verbatim, it duplicates the text of the previous bullet point.
- **Light Wells** (oboe and organ version), Performance Notes, 5th bullet point, line 1: "Where a fingering instruction have ..." should be : "Where a fingering instruction has ...".